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Don Quixote ID:: The Manager of La Manchaland

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Summary

Anyone who's had their blood drained directly by a Bloodfiend… is bound to eventually turn into a Bloodbag, no matter how long it takes.

And that would mean the end of coexistence; and that is why this became an unforgivable sin in the eyes of the Father.

Notes

This will be my biggest and most self indulgent project that I will be working on over the course of probably the rest of the year

Do not expect frequent updates as I will very likely be focusing other fics

But I do have the first three chapters relatively written, which I will post sooner(ish) kinda maybe

https://discord.gg/GPBNYYxExz

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: The Grand Reopening of La Manchaland

The gates of La Manchaland groaned as they parted, their rusted hinges shrieking like a chorus of the damned. For decades, the land had stood in silent decay, its bones cracked and crumbling beneath the weight of time. But now, under the glow of a bright new moon, it stirred once more.

Gone were the ruins of war, the echoes of rebellion. In their place, towering attractions stretched toward the sky, their bright lights flickering against the night like will-o'-the-wisps guiding the unwitting toward their brightness. The streets, once soaked in the sorrow of a kingdom left to rot, had been repainted with whimsy. The air itself had shifted, thick with the scent of something saccharine, something welcoming.

Banners of gold and crimson hung from the gates, their silken fabric embroidered with sigils of forgotten royalty. Firelight flickered across the freshly polished streets, where cobblestones, once slick with the ichor of fallen kindred, gleamed under careful restoration. Music, bewllowing and sweet, drifted from hidden speakers, wrapping around the new visitors like a lover's embrace. The scent of caramelized sugar and roasted meats curled in the air, laced with something just beneath the surface—something metallic, something wrong.

For beneath the gilded illusion of wonder, the Family waited, hunger dulled but never forgotten, their eyes gleaming from behind masks of joviality and welcome. The Bloodfiends had worked tirelessly. They had carved out a new vision for their cursed home, a place where the echoes of suffering could be masked beneath the laughter of the oblivious.

A grand amusement park, a wonderland of delight, a haven of dreams.

A feeding ground.

And as the first guests stepped through the threshold, delight shimmering in their eyes, the gates groaned once more—sealing shut behind them.

The humans came in droves, drawn by the spectacle of it all. The stories of La Manchaland's mysterious return spread like wildfire across the City. A forgotten kingdom reborn, a place of endless thrills, of extravagant performances and death-defying spectacles. The rumors whispered of rides unlike any other, of shows that would haunt the soul long after departure. Lured by promises of an unparalleled escape from the mundane, they stepped into La Manchaland with laughter on their lips, their hearts light, their defenses lowered.

The Manager stood upon the balcony of the central spire, gazing down at the milling crowds. Her crimson eyes, once burdened with sorrow, now gleamed with conviction. She watched as families and lovers meandered through the streets, their laughter echoing between the towering facades of once-abandoned theaters and palaces. Below, the masked attendants glided through the masses, their painted smiles frozen in an eerie, eternal grin.

They led the guests deeper into the wonders of La Manchaland—toward the Fantasy Blood-Shooting Range, where history itself bled into the games, the muskets primed with cartridges laced in red, each shot striking spectral echoes of soldiers long consumed by the land's insatiable hunger. Toward the Bloody Mary Manor, where candlelit halls whispered with unseen presences, the walls themselves sighing as if remembering those who wandered too deep. Each step through its cursed corridors felt like a descent into something far more ancient than mere illusion, the velvet-draped doors always opening wider than they had before.

Then there was the Eternal Parade. The heartbeat of La Manchaland. A celebration of endless revelry, where masked dancers never tired, twirling beneath lanterns that pulsed with something not quite light. The music never ceased, an alluring melody that wove its way into the mind, whispering of joy, of belonging, of insurmountable. Those who joined the festivities found themselves swept away in a performance from which few ever truly returned. As they had dined with monsters and never even noticed the fangs.

The Manager tilted her head as she watched the scene unfold. Somewhere, a child giggled as a marionette bowed deeply before her, its strings twitching to a puppeteer unseen. A couple clinked their glasses of deep red wine, never questioning the richness of its flavor. A man, wandering too far from the path, turned a corner and gasped—only for the sound to be swallowed by the laughter of the crowd as he was politely, almost lovingly, led back by a masked attendant with fingers just a little too long.

A kingdom had fallen here once. And in its place, something far more enduring had risen.

But La Manchaland welcomed them all into it's embrace.

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For those of you unfamiliar of Lamanchaland and it's festivities allow me to recount them for you. One by one.

The first stop of La Manchaland was a grand illusion, a symphony of elegance and deception, where guests were more than mere visitors—they were performers in a spectacle of beauty, a pageant of horror. Beneath the glimmering chandeliers and gold-trimmed archways, they wove unknowingly into the grand tapestry of the Barber's domain, where vanity was worshiped and transformation was law.

At its heart stood the atelier of the Barber, a lavish palace of fashion and art, both a sanctuary and a stage where appearances dictated fate. Its walls, tall and gleaming like mirrors, reflected the opulence within—endless rows of gowns that shimmered with impossible hues, suits that fit as though stitched from shadows and starlight. Mannequins who stood in eerie silence, each dressed in finery too perfect to have ever been worn before. The fabrics whispered as if longing for a body to claim.

From the moment a guest stepped inside, the Barber's masked attendants would descend upon them—silent phantoms in red and ivory. Their hands ghosted over fabric, precise and practiced, measuring, assessing, judging. The air smelled of rare perfumes, of jasmine, bergamot, and something richer beneath, something coppery and deep. The guests, unaware of the silent deliberation, stood still under their scrutiny, hypnotized by the spectacle.

Then, she would arrive.

The Barber.

Elegant beyond mortal measure, adorned in silks that shimmered like liquid moonlight, her every step a performance in it's own right. She moved with the grace of a dancer, the confidence of a queen, and when she swept forward, her bow was deep—an artist acknowledging

the blank canvas before her.

Her crimson eyes gleamed as she took in each guest, her smile sharp enough to cut.

"Ah, but you cannot possibly be seen like this, my dear. Such dull attire does you no favors."

Her voice, a silken whisper, left no room for refusal. After all who would you be to tell the benevolent artisans of this park what they did and did not know?

There was no choice but to comply.

The attendants moved swiftly, their hands pulling, tugging, adjusting. The air filled with the hush of fabric sliding over skin, the faint snip of scissors. The guests barely noticed how easily the seams parted, how effortlessly their old selves were stripped away. They gasped at their reflections, marveling at the perfection woven around them, never questioning the price.

The Barber's fingers trailed along a sleeve, a hem, a neckline. Her smile deepened, satisfied.

"Yes," she murmured, "now you belong."

And in the polished floors beneath their feet, something dark stirred—a ripple in the reflection, a shadow that did not match its owner. But why would you care? You are beautiful beyond words.

The guests were ushered into dressing chambers, where they were fitted into the Barber's masterpieces—garments stitched with unseen enchantments, weaving their fate into fabric. The silk whispered against their skin, cool and weightless, as though it had a will of its own. Threads shimmered beneath the candlelight, pulsing with something almost alive.

Here hierarchy was dictated by dress. Those adorned in the most elaborate silks and embroidery found themselves elevated, led to luxury lounges where "exotic wines" flowed freely, each sip sinking deep into their veins, their essence drained in ways too delicate to notice. Their laughter grew softer, their gazes hazy, their reflections in the polished glass slightly slower than their movements.

But the unfashionable—the poorly dressed? The ones who were unable to find a suitable garment to fall upon their forms?

Their walk down the runway would be a short one.

Down the velvet-lined path, beneath the cold, unblinking gazes of the masked audience, they would march, basking in the fleeting thrill of attention, oblivious to the silent decision being made. The masked judges would watch without a word, their gloved hands poised as if ready to applaud, yet never moving. Then, at the slightest flick of the Barber's fingers, the unworthy were gently, almost lovingly, escorted behind the stage.

Led away by elegant hands, their departure was unnoticed by those too caught up in their own indulgence. Too caught up living in a world of dreams.

Where did they go?

None who left the stage ever returned to ask.

Yet, fashion was not the only performance the Barber oversaw.

For those who pleased her, who embraced the beauty of her domain, there was one final game. She would lead them beyond the silken halls of Area 1, through a gilded archway where the candlelight faded into something colder, the air thickening with a scent richer than perfume. The walls grew darker, the floor softer, absorbing every footstep like flesh beneath silk.

The Fantasy Blood-Shooting Range.

A carnival game. A mockery of history disguised as entertainment.

The chamber stretched before them, vast and cavernous. The walls were adorned with a grotesque, dreamlike mural—a tableau of war, drenched in reds and silvers, depicting the ancient battle between Bloodfiends and humans. Every stroke of paint, every bleeding hue, told the story as it truly was. Not the sanitized myth, not the legend retold by human tongues, but the truth.

The Barber herself had painted it with her own two hands. And, as she always did, she would tell the story. The story of how La Manchaland had come to be

She would step forward, her crimson eyes narrowing, her voice carrying the weight of centuries past.

"La Manchaland was not always a place of wonder."

Her voice was honey laced with venom, soft yet tinged with something bitter.

“Once, it was a battlefield. Our kind were hunted. Our existence deemed an affront.”

She spoke as one who had lived through it. As one who had fought. As one who remembered.

The story continued to unravel—the betrayal, the bloodshed, the burning hatred that fueled the war between human and Bloodfiend. The Barber’s hand would ghost over a painted figure—her own likeness, captured in oil and blood, her expression frozen in defiance.

"You see, darlings," she murmured, her gloved fingers lingering on the mural. "Humans feared us. Loathed us. And yet, there was one above all who sought peace. The great fixer, Don Quixote."

Her painted lips curled into a smile.

"And so, La Manchaland was born—a dream of peace. But tell me…"

With a languid gesture, she motioned toward the weapons displayed before them—rifles, intricately carved, lined with silver filigree, polished to perfection.

"Why don’t you test your skill? A little game, in honor of our history."

The rules were simple. to which were quite simple indeed. Targets, shaped like mock Bloodfiends, would rise from the mist—mannequins painted with exaggerated fangs, clawed hands, monstrous depictions lifted straight from human nightmares.

To these horrific immitations the guests were encouraged to fire. To strike down the creatures of the past,to emulate the feelings that perhaps their distant ancestors felt.

At first, it seemed harmless. A game merely mocking the barbaric intentions that these vile beasts might have once had.

Laughter rippled through the chamber as the first shots rang out.

But with time as the felled targets were changed throughout the rounds, the grotesque caricatures would began to melted away, replaced by something else entirely. Bloodbags dressed in fine suits and flowing gowns, masks covering their half-lidded eyes, their

postures regal yet unsettlingly familiar.

The laughter would slowly begin to die out.

Because the new targets were the other guests. The very same people they had been drinking with, speaking with, standing beside mere moments ago.

The Barber would step behind them then, lowering her voice to a whisper.

"Tell me," she would purr, amusement curling around her words like silk, "does it feel different now?"

She would watch—relish—the way fingers trembled on triggers, the moment realization set in.

This was a reminder. A lesson to be taught about how one should come to appreciate history, to not trample upon those already downtrodden.

A game where the hunted became the hunters, and the hunters, for a fleeting moment, were forced to look through different eyes.

Whether they laughed it off, dismissed the unease curling in their gut, or felt the weight of the history they had unknowingly stepped into—it did not matter.

Because by then, they were already part of La Manchaland's history.

And this history was written in blood.

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Beyond the Fantasy Blood-Shooting Range, past the winding streets where laughter and revelry echoed like ghosts of an era long past, stood a structure unlike the others. Known as The Bloody Mary Manor.

It did not glitter with the false promises of an amusement park, nor did it invite with bright colors and whimsical fanfare. No—this place loomed.

Twisted wrought-iron gates, rusted with something far darker than grime, framed a pathway of cracked stone leading to the manor's skeletal façade. Towering and decrepit, its blackened spires clawed at the sky, seeming to sway under the weight of its own history. The windows, tall and coffin-shaped, flickered with dim candlelight, shadows shifting within like restless specters.

At the threshold, beneath a heavy wooden arch inscribed with forgotten scripture, stood the Priest.

His withered, pallid skin seemed almost translucent beneath the sickly glow of the yellow lanterns. He was immaculate, dressed in a pressed black suit, its sharp angles a stark contrast against the decay of the manor behind him. A black ribbon-tied necktie lay flat against his chest, a noose waiting to tighten.

And when he spoke, his voice was a whisper of silk—a rustle of funeral cloth.

"Welcome, my children. You stand before a house of faith… and fear. Do you dare enter?"

For those who stepped inside, the darkness was immediate—thick and suffocating, wrapping around them like mourning veils. The scent of melted wax, aged wood, and iron-heavy blood clung to the air, saturating the senses, making the very act of breathing feel like an intrusion upon this ancient ground.

The hallways stretched unnaturally long, lined with shaped mirrors and portraits framed in baroque gold. The paintings' subjects watched with hollow, unblinking eyes, their gazes following every step, every breath.

The mirrors, however, were worse. At first, they reflected only what they should—the guests' wide-eyed faces, their hesitant movements. But a second glance revealed something else. A warped version of themselves—a distortion cast by sins long buried.

A woman might see herself draped in funeral black, her hands bloodstained, clutching something that writhed. A man might glimpse a grin on his own face that did not belong to him, teeth too sharp, teeth that were too many.

Then, from the depths of the manor, the Priest's voice curled through the corridors like incense smoke.

"Once, we sought peace with you."

The whisper did not come from one place, but from everywhere at once. It crept beneath the skin, pressed against the back of the skull—a benediction spoken in the voice of a dying reverant.

"Once, we took your hand in goodwill, offering trust… blood… sanctuary."

And as if summoned by his words, candlelight flared—not warm and inviting, but high and unnatural, their flames twisting into shapes that moved. Their shadows recounting a story across the very walls surrounding them.

Bloodfiends, kneeling in supplication. Humans, cloaked in righteousness, raising their blades in false mercy. And then—betrayal.

The candlelight shuddered violently, throwing the room into sudden, breathless motion.

The paintings began to shift—expressions contorting into silent screams, their gilded prisons unable to contain their agony. The mirrors, once mere illusions, now reflected something real—flesh torn asunder, bodies writhing in a death that had long since passed.

And then—the true game began.

At the manor's heart lay a vast, cathedral-like chamber, the chapel of those who had been condemned.

Stone pews, cracked with age, stretched in rows beneath a vaulted ceiling, where a grand stained-glass window cast a kaleidoscope of colors onto the blood-darkened floor. The glass depicted a martyr engulfed in flames, their hands raised in silent prayer.

But the pews that lined this room were not empty. No, figures sat in stillness, clad in mourning attire, their funeral veils hiding all but the faint glimmer of masks beneath. Not one moved, except for one.

At the altar, beneath the window's sorrowful gaze, stood the Priest.

This was not merely a haunted house.

This was a trial. A judgment. A forced confession for those who had entered it's embrace. As the guests stepped forward, the doors slammed shut behind them with a resounding boom.

The Priest's thin fingers traced the spine of an ancient tome resting on the altar, its pages brittle, its language long since lost. He did not look up immediately. Instead, he let the silence stretch—let the fear settle. Then, he lifted his gaze.

His crimson eyes gleamed, unreadable, knowing.

"You have partaken in the feast of our land, have you not?"

His voice was not meant to entertain like the other bloodfiends, not meant to provide comfort or lure you further beyond what your eyes could see.

"You have laughed in these streets, indulged in the pleasures we so graciously provide."

A pause.

Then, softly—

"Now, tell me… what price do you believe your joy is worth?"

The room seemed to breathe. The shadows stretched and shifted, the corners inching closer at the edges of their vision. But when they would turn, they were the same as always.

The guests were given a choice. A simple one at that.

To confess—and atone for the wrongdoings they are guilty of. Or to deny—and be judged for the sins they so vehemently hide in their midns.

For those who confessed, the Priest listened in utter silence, hands clasped before him in reverence. Their sins—real or imagined—were drawn forth, dissected with ruthless precision, each word peeled open like flesh beneath a scalpel.

And when the confession was done, the Priest would smile—thin, knowing.

"Ah… how wretched you are."

His fingers would ghost over the pages of his tome, unreadable scripture dancing in the candlelight.

"And yet… perhaps even the damned deserve mercy."

The lights flickered. The pews trembled. Distant screams rattled the walls.

Then—it was over.

The guests would be allowed to leave and return to the delights of La Manchaland, their wrists marked with something unseen, a brand that only the manor's keepers could recognize.

But for those who denied their sins?

For those who sneered in the face of judgment, who claimed innocence in a house built on centuries of blood and betrayal? The congregation would stir.

The figures in the pews, so still, so silent, rose as one.

Their heads turned toward the accused. And then they would charge.

The guests were hunted, pursued through the twisting corridors of the manor, where the walls closed in, where doors led to nowhere, where whispers of those who had perished before them cried out in warning.

Few ever made it to the exit unscathed.

For in the end, the Priest did not offer salvation.

Only the illusion of it.

And as the doors to the Bloody Mary Manor creaked open once more, the guests stumbled into the streets—no longer something that could be considered human.

His voice followed them, low and laced with certainty.

"Do return soon, my children. Your sins shall not be soon forgotten."

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But as midnight draped its beckoning shroud over La Manchaland, the streets would transform. The lanterns that lined the cobblestone pathways would flicker with an ethereal violet glow, their light shimmering like distant stars caught in glass bottles. The air would

pulse with a slow, hypnotic melody, a waltz that did not simply play—it would call.

At the heart of this eerie symphony stood the Eternal Parade. Towering, elaborate floats adorned with silken drapery and fine white masks rolled through the streets, moving with an unnatural grace. Phantom-like figures, dressed in regal attire, danced upon them—silent, empty-eyed, their movements mechanical yet mesmerizing.

Atop the grandest float of them all, beneath an arch of ivory roses, stood the princess of this grand parade's—Rodion herself.

A vision in layers of cascading purple, her ballroom gown shimmered like dusk given form. Embroidered lilac flowers coiled like creeping vines along the fabric, whispering of something both delicate and unyielding. The corset that cinched her waist was black and white, a limit of balance, of purity . Her hair, long as a veil of moonlight, flowed like liquid silver, pooling at her feet, moving with a life of its own as though it might rise and wrap around the throat of anyone who dared meet her gaze for too long.

And those eyes—crimson and unforgiving, just like all of those around her.

They swept over the gathered crowd with the weight of disdain, taking in the masked onlookers, the trembling humans who had unknowingly stepped into her world. Then, with a smile both sweet and damning, she lifted a hand—and the dance began.

The moment her fingers curled in invitation, the music swelled, its great, booming notes enveloping all who would bear listen. The Bloodfiend dancers descended from the floats, their steps bounding as they sauntered toward the guests, their masked faces unreadable.

"Do not be shy," Rodion cooed, her voice honeyed with amusement. "This is a night of celebration."

She extended a hand, and as if bound by some unseen force, the guests found themselves drawn forward. Some hesitated. Some stepped back. But hesitation meant nothing here. They were already part of the performance.

The Bloodfiends seized their partners, pulling them into a waltz that was too perfect, too synchronized, too unnatural to be anything but a performance animated frame by frame. Their grip was gentle, but there was no mistaking the quiet power beneath their fingers. The

dance was one to participate in, to relax and let yourself be swept away.

Round and round they moved, their feet tracing intricate patterns upon the black-marble streets, the rhythm dictating their every step. The human guests spun, twirled, laughed—some genuinely, others with a growing sense of unease. Because something was wrong.

For their dancing partners never blinked. Their movements never faltered. And the longer one danced, the heavier their limbs felt, as if this dance was draining them, drawing from something far deeper than mere exhaustion.

The Princess watched it all. Her smile never wavered. Not when the first human's steps stumbled, their breath coming quicker, as though their very life was being siphoned away. Not when another's legs buckled, their strength unraveling, their partner catching them in an embrace far too intimate for what it truly was—a feeding.

The masks worn by the Bloodfiends shifted, cracking open along hidden seams, revealing glimpses of too-wide grins, of fangs gleaming beneath the moon's pale glow. And still, the music played. And still, the dancers moved upon feet that never stopped.

When the first human collapsed, their partner carefully lowered them to the ground, their movements tender—almost reverent. And then, one by one, the others followed. Some slumped into the arms of their partners, their bodies limp and dazed, their minds caught in a waking dream. Others sank to the floor, their breath shallow, their pulses weak.

Rodion descended from her throne of ivory roses, stepping down from her float with the grace of a queen stepping onto the gallows. She moved among the fallen dancers, her gown sweeping over the marble, her fingers trailing along their cheeks, their foreheads, their trembling lips.

"A valiant effort," she murmured, kneeling beside one of the guests, tucking a stray lock of hair behind their ear. "But even the finest dancers must rest eventually."

Her voice dripped with false sympathy, her eyes gleaming with something far colder. She turned to her Bloodfiends, who still stood poised, their lips stained a deeper shade of red.

"Feed as you will," she instructed, her tone one of idle boredom. "Let

them sleep kindly, unknowing of their fate."

"And should they wake…"

A smile.

"Perhaps they shall dance again."

The remaining guests—those who had yet to be claimed by the parade—stood frozen, watching as the unconscious were bit into and drained, their friends and family fading into the night.

Rodion turned back to them, her crimson eyes shimmering beneath the violet lanterns. "Now then," she said, spreading her arms as the music swelled once more. "Shall we begin another round?"

And as the orchestra struck up the next melody—the dance continued, for the name means something yes? A parade who's music never ends, whos participants never tire.

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But alas, you are not here for them, are you?

Not for the elegant Barber, whose scissors could cut through all, spinning fabric from the finest of silk—dresses that cling like whispers, decorations that dance like ghosts in the wind. Nor for the benign Priest, who stands at his pulpit, his voice a rolling tide of reverence, delivering sermons that drown the faithful in poetry and penance. Not even for the breathtaking Princess, who twirls atop her grand float in a perpetual dance, her every movement a burst of color so dazzling it could turn even the most extravagant celebrations of the City green with envy.

No.

You are here for none of them.

You hardly even know what truly takes place within the walls of this awful place, and yet you return. Time and time again. Banging against the gates of La Manchaland from the very hour it manifests, like a knight who has come upon a great and terrible tower, seeking an audience with the princess who lingers within.

And when the gates yawn open, when the revelry begins and the world outside fades to myth, you walk through the avenues of La Manchaland not as a mere guest, not as prey. Even though you are another fool lost in the illusion.

You do not linger before the spectacles laid out for you, nor do you indulge in the pleasures crafted with such painstaking artistry. You do not stop at the Barber's silk-draped atelier, nor at the Priest's cathedral of whispered sins, nor even at the Princess's gleaming, never-ending parade.

No—your feet carry you past them all, driven by something deeper, something unseen. Past the twisted avenues, past the horrors that others dare not name, past the crimson-stained joy and the laughter that never truly fades.

Because you have your eyes set on something else.

At the very heart of La Manchaland, towering above its grand amusements and hidden horrors, stands a castle—an imposing monolith of stone and shadow, perched atop a jagged peak that looms over the entire park like an unblinking eye.

And from its highest spire, a lone figure watches.

The Manager of La Manchaland.

A presence like a specter, regal yet distant, neither ruler nor performer, neither host nor prisoner. She does not play the games her Family revels in. She does not partake in the charade. She is something else—an observer, a warden, a ghost that lingers in the marrow of this place, unseen yet all-knowing.

She has no domain within La Manchaland. No carousel, no cathedral, no stage.

Her kingdom is the Castle itself—a vast and uninviting fortress where no guest has ever stepped foot.

The halls stretch endlessly, adorned with tattered banners, their sigils faded but never forgotten. Not to her. Moonlight filters through tall, arched windows, casting elongated shadows upon the marble floors, where the faint echoes of footsteps—footsteps that once carried purpose, once carried meaning—never truly fade.

At the Castle's center lies the Grand Hall, a cavernous space where

time itself stands still. A long table, set for a banquet that ended ages ago, rests beneath the glow of an ornate chandelier, its flickering light reflecting off the polished obsidian walls.

And at the head of this silent court, she often sits.

Sancho.

A figure of poise and lethargy, of authority and disinterest, of purpose and resignation.

Her black coat, adorned with gold trimmings and epaulets, speaks of a station once revered. A uniform meant for a commander. A symbol of status and rule. Yet, she wears it not with pride, but with resignation —as though it were a shackle rather than a badge.

Beneath it, an elegant white shirt rises into a high collar, framing her throat like the last remnants of nobility clinging to a warrior long removed from the battlefield. A black cravat, its design intricate yet unassuming, rests against her chest, half-obscured by a golden chain that drapes across her figure in quiet elegance.

Her long, golden-blonde hair cascades down, untouched by time or care, framing a face perpetually unreadable. And yet, her glowing red eyes—so sharp, so unwavering—burn with something deeper.

Conviction? Duty?

Or the weight of everything she refuses to acknowledge?

She is a woman of few words and fewer affections. She is not cruel, nor kind—merely detached from the fanfare of La Manchaland, unmoved by the grandeur her Family so carefully cultivates.

Where others delight in deception, she watches from above, unimpressed by their theatrics, untouched by their carefully spun illusions.

She speaks only when necessary, her voice a flat, deadpan drawl, as though every syllable is an obligation rather than a choice. Her pessimism is an unshakable force, woven into every sigh, every sharp remark, every tired glance cast at the world below.

She follows no hierarchy, respects no traditions, and cares little for the rituals of Bloodfiends. It is not rebellion. It is apathy. Whatever power struggles, whatever ambitions burn within her kin, they do not touch

her.

And yet—

There are fractures.

Flickers of perky enthusiasm, swiftly smothered. A moment of silent admiration when she speaks of Fixers, her voice betraying a deep-seated passion for those who fight against the inevitable.

And, most telling of all—

The way she waits.

How, when the appointed hour arrives, she moves from her place at the long-abandoned feast. How her footsteps echo through the silent corridors as she descends the endless staircases of the Castle, each step measured, unhurried.

How she arrives at the great doors, knowing full well what she will find waiting beyond them.

You.

The Knight, returned once more to the tower of stone and shadow, undeterred by the horrors of the park, blind to its monsters, deaf to its wails.

Returned, as you always do.

To tell her of the world outside, of the things that unfold beyond the veiled gates of La Manchaland.

And though she does not say it, though her expression does not waver, though she regards you with the same tired eyes as always—

She opens the doors.

And she allows you inside.

For however little she may care for the world, however disillusioned she may be with the games of her Family—

She is waiting for you.

For you are her Knight, shining beneath that beautiful White Moon.

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Chapter 2: Of Fixers and Knights

Chapter Summary

> For a moment, the pair seemed to be reminiscing a certain shared memory together…
> … before gritting their teeth.

Chapter Notes

> Okay so dope heres part 2,
>
> The repitition of certain parts is done on purpose just to be clear.
>
> I also have a very small discord server that I want to use for polling what stories to do next, so feel free to join if you want
>
> https://discord.gg/WVz3M49h
>
> Another note, Thank You! 2500+ hits and 200+ kudos! It means a lot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

□□□□□□◈🐴◈□□□□□□

The great castle doors swing open, their weight dragging against the ancient stone, the sound reverberating through the empty halls like the exhale of something long dormant, something patient—waiting. The threshold looms before you, a dark, gaping maw that swallows the lights and sounds of La Manchaland behind you, leaving only the dim glow of blood-red lanterns and the fractured moonlight bleeding through stained glass.

And, as expected, Sancho stands before you.

She is poised yet distant, her presence as unwavering as the castle itself. The long coat of midnight black and gold rests upon her shoulders, its regal trimmings doing little to soften the weight it seems to carry. Strands of golden hair fall unbound, catching in the lantern glow like slivers of molten light, brushing against the high collar of her crisp white shirt. But it is her eyes that hold you in place—burning red. They flicker with something unreadable, something quiet yet

heavy, as they take you in with detached acknowledgment.

"You're late," she says, her voice flat.

You are not.

But you do not argue.

She has already turned before you can respond, her coat billowing slightly with the motion, her posture as indifferent as ever. Without another word, she moves deeper into the castle, each step steady, unhurried, certain.

And, like always, you follow.

The silence here is absolute. Not the warm, tranquil kind, but the hollow, suffocating stillness of a place long abandoned by time. The only sound is the soft echoes of Sancho's boots against the marble floors, each step a quiet drumbeat in the air. The corridors stretch endlessly, their towering archways lined with faded banners, their once-proud sigils now barely clinging to the fabric of history.

The lanterns flicker as you pass, casting long, distorted shadows against the cold stone walls—your own silhouette stretched thin, warped by the dim glow. The deeper you go, the heavier the air becomes, thick with something forgotten, something waiting to be remembered.

Then, the grand hall opens before you.

The chandelier above—a monstrous thing of red crystal and blackened iron—casts a dim, eerie glow across the cavernous space. It catches on the obsidian walls, the polished surface swallowing the light yet reflecting back something fractured, something not quite whole. A banquet table dominates the center, long enough to seat an army, but empty.

The goblets, silver and pristine, are filled with nothing. The plates remain untouched, void of any feast, their presence a cruel reminder of something that no longer exists. The air is thick with dust and something faintly metallic—like ink long dried on parchment.

At the head of the table, her seat awaits.

Sancho moves with ease, lowering herself into the high-backed chair with the kind of practiced familiarity that suggests habit, not comfort.

One arm drapes over the side, her fingers idly tracing patterns into the empty space beneath them, while the other rests against the polished surface of the table. She watches as you take your place across from her, the candlelight dancing against the gold in her hair, throwing sharp shadows across the planes of her face.

Silence stretches between you. Not awkward. Not tense.

Just routine.

She exhales—not quite a sigh, not quite anything at all. Then, she shifts, resting her chin against her knuckles, her eyes half-lidded, unreadable in the dim glow of the chandelier.

And then, finally she speaks.

"So?"

One word.

Lazy. Casual. Unbefitting of some great bloodfiend lord most would think.

She does not clarify. She does not need to.

You know what she wants.

What she has always wanted.

She wants to hear your stories.

Again.

Not because she has forgotten them—Sancho forgets nothing that she wishes to remember.

She simply... wants to hear them again.

You hesitate, if only for a moment. You wonder if she is aware of how many times she has asked this of you, how often she has pretended to be uninterested, only to listen with quiet intensity, absorbing every word as though each syllable was something precious, something fragile.

But this is how it has always been.

So, you speak.

You tell her of the world beyond La Manchaland—the world of neon spires and endless backstreets, of Fixers and Syndicates, of coffee vendors who trade in secrets instead of coin, of skyrails that hum with unseen electricity as they weave through the City's fractured skyline. You speak of things that have long since become mundane to you—the shifting alliances of nameless wars, the whispered fears of those who live in the shadows, the small, insignificant joys of people who carve out their lives beneath a sky that does not watch them.

And she listens.

She always listens.

Her expression remains neutral, composed, but you know better. You have learned to read between the stillness, to recognize the way her fingers tap idly against the table's polished surface—a slow, thoughtful rhythm that betrays the sharpness of her focus. She never interrupts, never tells you to stop, but sometimes—just sometimes—you catch something flickering in her gaze. A brief spark of interest. A shadow of something distant. A whisper of longing for something she would never admit to missing.

Then, at last, you reach the part of the story you both know well. One you have told her countless times, one she has heard enough to recite from memory if she so wished. Her fingers still against the table for just a moment before she tilts her head slightly, one brow raising in feigned exasperation.

"That one again?" she murmurs, voice flat, unimpressed.

And yet—she does not stop you.

So, you continue.

And for a time, the Castle is not so empty.

For a time, Sancho is not so alone.

The candlelight wavers, casting shifting shadows across the long banquet table. The vastness of the grand hall swallows your voice, yet somehow, she hears every word.

Sancho remains as she always is—lounging with deceptive nonchalance, her red eyes half-lidded, glowing embers barely stirred. Her fingers tap idly, a slow rhythm against the polished wood, but her gaze never truly leaves you.

The story unfolds as it has a hundred times before.

You speak of places she will never see.

Of streets that pulse with life, of alleyways thick with the scent of spice and steel, of markets where merchants barter in voices as loud as their wares. Of crowded plazas where laughter rises like smoke does from fires, of buildings older than memory, where people whisper their dreams to gods who do not listen.

And then—you speak of Fixers.

Her fingers still.

Her expression does not shift, but you see it in the subtle way her posture straightens, in the quiet tension that settles in her shoulders.

Fixers.

You have long since learned that Sancho does not care for most things. Not the hierarchy of her kind, not the elaborate games her Family plays, not the fleeting joys of those who wander La Manchaland's cursed streets.

But Fixers—Fixers are different.

And so, when you recount their exploits, their battles, their desperate struggles against the weight of the City itself—you know she is listening with more than idle curiosity.

Even now, as you tell her of a lone Fixer who stood against impossible odds, who fought against something larger, more monstrous than himself—her gaze sharpens, just slightly.

It is not excitement, not quite.

It is something deeper. Something that lingers in the silence between your words.

And when you finish, when your voice fades into the cavernous hush of the Grand Hall, she exhales.

Then, slowly, she rests her chin against her palm and regards you with a look that is both expectant and unimpressed.

"That's the third time you've told me that one," she remarks, voice flat, almost bored.

You do not respond immediately.

Because you know.

You know she does not mind.

You know she will ask for another.

And she will listen all the same.

She allows the silence to stretch, as if contemplating whether to dismiss you now, to feign disinterest, to retreat once more into the solitude she has built for herself.

And then—her gaze flickers for a moment.

It lingers on the empty plates, the untouched goblets.

"…Tell me another," she says.

As though it is an afterthought.

It is not.

And so, you do.

Time passes in a way that is difficult to measure within these walls. The stories blend into each other, one memory bleeding into the next, until the flickering chandelier above seems dimmer than before, until the shadows creeping along the obsidian walls seem longer, stretching toward you like echoes of something long past. But she still does not speak a word

Occasionally, she will scoff at something particularly foolish—"Idiots, the lot of them," she mutters when you speak of a Fixer biting off more than they could chew.

At times, she will shift slightly, tilting her head when something piques her interest—"And?" she will prod when you pause at the height of a tale.

And every now and then, when she thinks you are not watching, you catch something almost like a smirk tugging at the corner of her lips.

But it never lasts.

It never lingers long enough to become real.

Eventually, the weight of time settles back into the room.

The stories, no matter how many you tell, must always come to an end.

And Sancho, no matter how much she listens, will never ask you to stay.

You rise from your seat, but she does not stop you.

Instead, she leans back once more, arms crossing over her chest, that same detached expression settling onto her features like a veil.

"You're leaving," she states.

Not as a question.

As an inevitability.

As though she has always known you would.

Because this is the way things are.

And yet—just as you turn toward the vast, empty halls leading back to La Manchaland's twisted wonders, she speaks again.

"Come back tomorrow."

Her voice is quieter now, less of an order and more of a passing remark.

But you hear it.

And when you glance back, when you meet those glowing red eyes that never quite reveal what lurks behind them—

You know you will.

□□□□□□♣♘♣□□□□□□

It is all the same.

Every time, it is the same.

The Fantasy Blood-Shooting Range still echoes with the crack of gunfire, each crimson-stained spectacle drawing cheers from unseen spectators. The Bloody Mary Manor still looms in the distance, its priest standing at the threshold, his voice forever poised to deliver judgment. The Princess still dances, spinning in an unending dance, the spark that ignites the onlookers into motion, caught forever in the rhythm of something neither wholly joy nor wholly despair.

And yet—you do not stop for any of them.

You never stop for them.

The Family plays their roles to perfection, spinning their illusions for guests who scream in terror or delight. Their world exists in a cycle of lies and ruin, a masquerade without end. But you?

You walk past it all. You always do.

Because there is only one destination that matters.

The Castle.

The heart of La Manchaland.

It looms at the center of everything, its jagged peaks tearing into the sky, its cold stone walls untouched by the fake joy that consumes the rest of the park. A fortress of silence, of distance—of something far older than the games played below. The rest of La Manchaland writhes in its eternal nightmare, but the Castle? The Castle simply waits.

And at its doors, she is waiting.

Sancho does not greet you.

She never does.

She merely stands at the threshold, one hand resting against the frame as if debating whether or not to bar your entry.

Instead, she watches.

Red eyes glowing beneath the pale light of the moon, her expression unreadable, her posture as relaxed as it is impenetrable. There is something almost idle about the way she regards you, something that does not quite touch the rest of her.

Then, with a sigh—more out of obligation than anything else—she steps aside.

And the cycle continues.

The halls remain as vast, as empty, as forgotten as they were yesterday. The faded banners still hang in quiet reverence, their meaning lost to time. The long banquet table still waits, adorned with plates that will never be filled, goblets that will never be raised. The great chandelier of red crystal still casts its sullen glow, illuminating a space that has long since ceased to be a place of feasts and laughter.

And at its head, she takes her seat.

You do the same.

Sancho is as she was the night before—draped in her noble finery, her coat of deep black and gold worn without pride or care. The chain at her throat catches the candlelight, a dull gleam against fabric long untouched by the weight of real authority. Her fingers tap against the polished wood in the same motion.

And then, as though this is the first time, as though this is not a ritual older than memory, she speaks.

"Tell me a story."

She looks up at you expectantly. Something between a request a request and an order.

Something in between.

And so, you do.

Because this is how it always goes.

The stories spill from your lips as they always have, winding through the candlelit hall like a melody long since memorized. The words are well-worn, their edges softened by repetition, yet they still fall as if new—because for Sancho, they must always be new.

You tell her of Fixers again, because you know she will listen.

You tell her of battles fought in darkened alleys, of men and women who rise and fall beneath the weight of their own convictions. You recount the victories, the losses, the moments of brilliance and folly alike.

And she listens.

She always listens.

Leaning back in her chair, eyes dim, posture betraying neither interest nor boredom. But you know her well enough now to catch the signs—the slight tilt of her head when something intrigues her, the near-imperceptible tensing of her fingers when a tale nears its climax.

"That's the fourth time you've told me that one," she remarks, just as she did before.

And just like before, she does not stop you.

She lets the silence settle, lets it stretch between you like something tangible, something with weight.

Then—

"…Tell me another."

And so, you do.

Because this is how it always goes.

The night stretches on in the same slow, inevitable rhythm.

You speak, she listens.

She scoffs, you smirk.

She mutters insults at fools who dared challenge the City, and you let her.

It is the same as before.

The same as every night.

Until, at last, as the candlelight wanes and the shadows stretch long, you rise from your seat.

And she does not stop you.

She never does.

Instead, she leans back, arms crossed, voice as dry and unimpressed as ever.

"You're leaving."

It is not a question.

It never is.

Then, you turn toward the great, empty halls, toward the path that will lead you back to the waking nightmare of La Manchaland.

But just before you step away—

"Come back tomorrow."

It is quieter than before.

And you know, even as you leave the castle's cold embrace, even as the horrors of the park flicker back into existence around you—

That you will.

Because this is how it always goes.

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La Manchaland had always been an enigma, a whispered legend passed between those who claimed to have glimpsed its impossible splendor. A city of wonder and horror, of celebration and madness, existing without origin or explanation. No one knew from where it came or why it appeared when it did—only that, when the time was right, its gates would manifest at the edge of the City like the mouth of a great beast, yawning open to swallow those willing to step inside.

And like countless others before you, you had entered.

You came for the wonders. For the sights that defied reason and the spectacles that left even the most jaded souls breathless. The tales had reached your ears—stories of a carnival untouched by the passage of time, of delights that twisted into horrors, of horrors that became delights. There had been warnings, too, but they had not stopped you. They never stopped anyone.

Beyond the rusted gates, La Manchaland had stretched out before you, a world unlike any other.

The Fantasy Blood-Shooting Range, where the crack of gunfire rang endlessly through the air, and crimson splattered like fireworks against the walls, a spectacle both grotesque and mesmerizing.

The Bloody Mary Manor, where shadows did not obey the laws of light, where portraits wept and mirrors whispered secrets that no living soul should have known.

The Princess, eternally dancing atop her float, her joy infectious, her beauty radiant, her laughter carrying through the streets like a melody that wrapped itself around the hearts of all who heard it.

There was no end to the marvels. No limit to the horrors.

And yet, while others lost themselves in the revelry—while they screamed in delight or terror, consumed by the spectacle—you found yourself looking elsewhere.

Your eyes drifted past the carnival lights, past the painted smiles and flickering illusions.

Because in the distance, towering above it all, stood the Castle.

It loomed, untouched by the madness that consumed the rest of La Manchaland. A fortress of stone and shadow, cold and unmoving, its peaks piercing the sky like broken swords. It felt realer than the world below—more solid, more certain. The park was a dream, an ever-shifting performance, but the Castle? The Castle was something else entirely.

No guests ventured there, as no invitations had been given.

And yet, your feet carried you forward.

Up the jagged road, past the winding paths laid out for the pretenders, away from the world of illusion and into something other.

Something that had been waiting for you.

Waiting for a long, long time.

And at the gates—

She was waiting, too.

The Castle had been as imposing then as it was now.

Stone walls stretched toward the heavens, banners fluttering in the wind like the remnants of a forgotten kingdom. The great doors had stood closed, silent, as if daring you to knock.

And when you did, they had not groaned or creaked with ominous intent.

They had simply opened.

And there she was.

A woman of regal bearing and effortless apathy, draped in a coat of deep black and gold. Her cravat was neatly tied, her golden chain catching the distant glow of carnival lights. The red of her eyes was stark against the pale moonlight, burning with an intensity that did not wane, even in boredom.

She did not look surprised to see you. She did not look curious.

She simply stared, fingers resting idly at her side, as if your presence was neither an inconvenience nor a point of interest.

And then, in a voice as dry as the wind that whistled through the empty halls behind her, she spoke.

"You're lost."

Not a question. A fact.

And yet, something in her tone lacked conviction—because both of you knew it wasn’t true.

You hadn’t gotten lost.

You had come here on purpose.

She sighed, long and suffering, as if already tired of an interaction that had barely begun.

"You shouldn’t be here."

But she did not close the door.

She did not send you away.

And so, in a moment of foolishness—or perhaps something else entirely—you stepped inside.

The halls of the Castle had been cold.

Not in temperature, but in presence. In feeling. In the way it seemed untouched by the whimsical nature that consumed the rest of La Manchaland.

It did not try to impress you.

It did not try to frighten you.

It simply was.

And she, the woman who had allowed you entry, had been the same.

She had walked ahead of you without a word, leading you through the silent corridors, past the faded banners that hung in quiet reverence, past the great banquet hall set for a feast that had never been eaten.

She had not asked why you were here.

She had not asked what you wanted.

She had simply let you follow.

It wasn't until she reached the long banquet table—grand, empty, eternal—that she finally turned to face you again.

She gestured lazily toward one of the many vacant seats, the motion indifferent. A half-hearted courtesy, a silent "sit if you want" that carried the weight of someone who had already decided she would regret this.

And when you sat, she did the same.

For a time, silence had stretched between you, long and unbroken.

Then, without preamble—

"Tell me a story."

You had blinked. Caught off guard.

She had not explained. Had not offered any reason for the request.

Just those three simple words, spoken with the weight of someone who had long since grown tired of silence.

And so—perhaps out of confusion, or amusement, or something deeper that neither of you had yet to name—

You told her one.

She had listened.

Not eagerly. Not with wide-eyed fascination or dramatic gasps.

But she had listened.

Leaning back in her chair, fingers tapping idly against the table, her glowing red eyes in feigned disinterest. But you had caught the signs—the slight tilts of her head, the way her fingers would still at certain moments, the nearly imperceptible hums when something piqued her interest.

And when the story had ended, she had let out a short breath.

Then—

"Tell me another."

And so, you did.

Because there was something compelling in the way she listened. In the way she reacted—not in grand exclamations or forced expressions, but in the subtle, genuine ways that mattered. In the scoffs of disapproval when so-called "heroes" proved themselves fools. In the amused huffs when something, against her will, entertained her.

It had been a conversation, in its own strange way.

And when the night had drawn to a close, when you had risen from your seat and turned toward the exit—

She had not stopped you.

She had merely watched, arms crossed, unreadable as ever.

But just before you left the grand hall, before you could disappear back into the nightmare below—

"Come back tomorrow."

And you had.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Until the nights became familiar. Until the stories repeated themselves. Until neither of you acknowledged that you had long since fallen into a cycle neither of you wished to break.

Until La Manchaland itself became irrelevant—until its horrors, its wonders, its endless spectacle no longer mattered.

Until, at the heart of it all, there was only this.

Only the King and the Knight.

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The nights stretched on, routine solidifying into something unspoken yet understood. Beyond the Castle's silent halls, the endless revelry of La Manchaland continued—performances played out, horrors unfolded, and delights twisted into terror before looping back again. The park moved in its eternal cycle, unchanging, undisturbed. And yet, none of it touched this place. None of it reached her. None of it reached you.

You would arrive at the great doors, as you always did, and she would be waiting, as she always was. Perhaps not at the entrance, not with eager anticipation, but somewhere within—always knowing you would come.

And as you spoke, as the words spilled forth into the hush of her domain, she would listen, as she always had.

But there was something else in those moments.

Something more than mere entertainment.

Something wrong..

At first, she told herself it was habit. Nothing more. The stories, though redundant and ridiculous, were simply a way to pass the time.

The sound of your voice, the cadence of your speech, the rise and fall of your tales—they meant nothing. Nothing beyond the present moment.

But that was a lie.

Because there were times—rare, fleeting—when your words stirred something in her chest. A sensation she had long since buried, long since refused to acknowledge.

Memory.

Once, in a life long past, there had been a storyteller.

But her stories had not been woven in solemn halls, nor whispered above the flickering lights of a twisted amusement park. They had not been born from habit, nor from the quiet understanding of two souls bound by routine.

No—her stories had been told in laughter.

More importantly, they had been told among three.

Even if one of them had not been particularly eager to listen.

That great fixer had spoken in exasperated sighs, in begrudging smirks, in the breathless urgency of one who did not wish to disappoint the eager fool who had begged for them.

A King—no, a child, really, with eyes too bright and a spirit too foolish for the world that sought to devour him. A King who had wielded power unlike any before him, who carried legacy in his veins, whether he had wanted it or not.

And yet, for all his strength, for all the weight of his family and his nobility—he had clung to the words of that fixer as though they were treasure.

He had sat before her with wide eyes, leaning forward, always forward, until he teetered dangerously at the edge of his chair.

"Tell me again!" he would plead. "Tell me of the places you've seen! The fights you've won! The people you've met!"

And though she had rolled her eyes, though she had scoffed at his absurd enthusiasm—

She had told him.

Time after time.

Because the stories made him smile.

Because, for reasons she did not care to name, she had wanted him to smile.

Because in those stories, she had been free.

Free to roam.
Free to wander.
Free to be the fixer—one who traveled without fear, without obligation, without the weight of responsibility pressing upon her shoulders.

But that was then.

That was a life lost to time, a memory dulled by willful suppression.

That King was gone.
And so was his Knight.

And she did not want to remember.

Not his voice.
Not his laughter.
Not the way he had clung to every word like they were something precious.

She did not want to acknowledge that you reminded her of that glorious Knight.

That the way you spoke, the way you recounted tales, the way you sat across from her with that same unshakable persistence, was too similar—too much.

So she ignored it.

She ignored the flicker of recognition.
She ignored the quiet pull of nostalgia.

She ignored the way her chest tightened when you arrived.
The way her lips almost—almost—curved at the edges when you spoke.

The way her hands clenched when the night ended and you stood to leave.

The way you made her feel like the King who had once roamed these halls, with his great family of four in tow.

Because this was not the past.

She was not him.
And you were not her.

And she did not care to remember.

Not when she could simply focus on what was in front of her.

Not when you were here.

She would not abandon her responsibilities.
She would not be blinded as that wretched King had been.

Because she was not him.

And she would not let herself become him.

But despite her best efforts, despite her silent wishes and unspoken prayers—nothing in this world lasts forever.

Not the stories.
Not the routine.
Not even you.

She had wanted it to last. Desperately. She had wanted the cycle to stretch on for eons—for time itself to bend to her will, to freeze within these halls, to allow the two of you to remain just as you were. Always.

And if she could have made it so, she would have.

Her lance, sharp and unyielding, had cut down foes beyond counting, had carved through those who stood in her way. Had pierced kings, split monsters in two, torn through entire legacies with the force of a woman who had never known how to back down.

If it meant keeping you here—keeping this constant in her life—she would have raised it against the heavens themselves.

But there were things even her lance could not strike down.

And one of them was time.

A simple, inevitable thing.

A being more absolute than any ruler, more unrelenting than any tyrant.

Time was something that no knight, no fixer, no warrior, no god could truly conquer.

And no matter how much she wanted to deny it—

You were not eternal.

The mere thought of it was unbearable.

To sit here, night after night, listening to your stories—watching as time ate away at you, piece by piece. To witness the slow, inevitable deterioration of the only thing in this world that had ever made her feel something again.

To remain frozen in youth, untouched by the passage of years, while you—her foolish, gallant knight—withered away like all the others.

It was an image she could not stomach.

You, who had strode into her domain without hesitation, who had faced the horrors of La Manchaland without faltering, who had sat at this very table and dared to meet her gaze as an equal—you, too, were nothing more than a human. A fleeting existence. A candle flickering against an unrelenting wind.

She despised it.

But the longer she sat at the head of the table, the more she listened to the tales you spun—stories of the world beyond these walls, of battles fought and dangers braved—the more she realized something.

Time was not the greatest threat to you.

No, the clock would claim you eventually, but that was not what set her teeth on edge. That was not what sent a slow, simmering rage curling through her veins.

It was the world.

The wretched, merciless world that waited beyond La Manchaland's gates.

A world teeming with horrors that lurked just out of sight, where shadows whispered and nightmares walked freely. A world where monsters did not only wear fangs and claws but human faces as well.

A world where Fixers fought battles they could not always win.

She had listened to your stories. Had pieced together the truth between your words, the hints of danger that you—in your foolish, naïve trust—had overlooked.

In your stories there were great beasts, monstrosities contained within facilities spread throughout the City. Beings known as Abnormalities, that had great powers that stemmed from simply anomalous, to inconcivable to even her mind. Stronger than the greatest fixers humanity had to offer.

Too did you have to be careful of your fellow man, those with greed in their eyes and knives in their hands. As in your stories there were bandits and sinners, willing to cast aside the life of another for things as simple as monetary value.

There too was her kind.

Bloodfiends.

She did not want to think it. Did not want to acknowledge it. But it clawed at the edges of her mind nonetheless.

The thought of one of them sinking their teeth into you—of their hands closing around your throat, of their hunger turning you into nothing more than another forgotten corpse—it infuriated her.

Her fingers curled into a fist atop the table.

She would not allow it.

She would not allow the world to take you from her.

And so, the Manager of La Manchaland reached a decision.

She had concieved an idea most ingenious.

She would keep you here.

Here, within the walls of La Manchaland. Here, where no monsters could reach you. Here, where you could remain at her table, night after night, spinning your stories beneath the glow of candlelight.

Here, where you would be safe.

But it was not her fault, was it? For you had filled her head with those stories of grandeur.

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Chapter End Notes

Who ready for my lifetime stew donclair/reader fic next hehe

Chapter 3: A tale spoken twice

Chapter Summary

> I began to understand my Father only when I began to create my own Kindreds… my Children. When they began to grow in number…
> I understood that Father wanted us to be happy.
> He wanted to free us from the crippling loneliness, for he was the first to suffer it.

Chapter Notes

> Ooooough come my children... feast upon the blood as it is drawn and let it wet your throats...
>
> Live as a bloodfiend should...
>
> Disc server
>
> https://discord.gg/ghB2YTBh

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And so, you returned once more.

As you always did.

With that same foolish, expectant gleam in your eyes, as if La Manchaland's wonders had yet to dull, as if its horrors had yet to wear away at your spirit. You walked these halls with the breathless excitement of a child lost in some fever-dream fairytale, unshaken, undeterred. As though this place—this grotesque spectacle of illusions and indulgence—still held within it something worth marveling at.

And, as always, she was waiting.

Not at the doors this time.

But within the castle, seated at her place, posture regal, expression unreadable. The long banquet table before her lay bare, save for the flickering glow of candlelight, its golden flames swaying as though

caught in some unseen breath. Shadows stretched behind her, looming and restless, weaving themselves into the vastness of the hall. Yet you had never feared them.

No, you strode into her domain as though you belonged. As though this place were not a mausoleum, but a home.

She did not stop you.

Instead, she listened.

Listened as you filled the silence with your stories, with the rise and fall of your voice, the familiar rhythm she had long since committed to memory. Words that should have long lost their novelty, yet still, you spun them with the same eager fervor, the same boundless energy.

Yet tonight, she barely heard them.

Her mind was elsewhere. Her thoughts restless.

There was something heavy upon her tongue, a weight she could not ignore.

A ridiculous notion. A foolish thought. Yet it clawed at the edges of her mind, refusing to be cast aside.

And when the hour grew late, when you rose from your chair with that same thoughtless ease, ready to step back into the world beyond her walls, she spoke.

"…Stay."

It was not an order.

But an offer.

You blinked, caught off guard by the suddenness of it.

Her expression did not shift, nor did she repeat herself. She simply waited.

And though the silence stretched between you, her meaning was clear.

She had expected this.

Expected the flicker of confusion in your gaze, the slight furrow of

your brow, the hesitance that sat at the corner of your lips. Of course, you would hesitate. Of course, you would not understand.

But what she had not expected—what she had not prepared for—was the way her fingers curled, ever so slightly, against the armrest of her chair. A reflex. A bracing. As though steeling herself for an answer she already knew she would not like.

“The night wanes,” she said, her voice steady, unaffected. Controlled. “Returning to the City at this hour is a needless risk.” She paused. “Remain within La Manchaland. For the night.”

A gift.

A mercy.

Or so she told herself.

But how silly a request that was.

Because already, she could see the response written upon your face. That gentle, infuriating kindness. That quiet resolve.

You had people waiting for you.

You could not simply abandon them—not for a whim, not for a dream. Not even for her.

“I see,” she murmured.

She did not shift. Did not move. Did not betray even a sliver of reaction. Yet in the dim glow of candlelight, something within her gaze sharpened.

Because she had known.

Of course she had known.

And yet, still—still, it sat bitter upon her tongue.

How easily you dismissed it. How lightly you refused. As though you did not understand what you were turning down.

As though you did not understand who you were turning away from.

How vexing.

Her fingers tapped idly against the arm of her chair—a slow, rhythmic succession.

"…I wonder," she mused, her voice light, lingering in the air between you. "If you had been born beneath La Manchaland's lights… if your first breath had been drawn within these walls, would you have left so easily?"

She did not expect an answer.

She did not need one.

Because she already knew.

No matter how many stories you told, no matter how many nights you returned—this was not your home.

And if she allowed you to leave now, you would continue to believe that.

For the world beyond La Manchaland was cruel. Sharp-toothed and hungry. It would devour you if given the chance.

And she would not allow it.

This world would not take you from her.

Had she so wished, she could have barred the doors. Drawn the gates. Commanded the creatures that lurked in La Manchaland's depths to rise, to prowl, to devour.

And you—her storyteller, her foolish knight—would never have left her sight again.

But what a hollow victory that would have been.

For you would hate her.

And that—more than your departure, more than the dangers that lurked beyond these walls—was a fate she could not bear.

Because if you hated her, you would not bring her your stories.

You would not sit before her, voice steady, eyes bright, spinning words into something more than mere tales.

You would not choose to return.

And that, above all else, she could not allow.

And so, she let you go.

She did not argue. Did not plead. Did not lower herself to desperate demands or grasping hands.

She simply watched.

Watched as you turned from her, as your figure strode past towering pillars and flickering candlelight. Watched as the great doors of the castle yawned open, as you stepped beyond them—beyond her.

And she did not follow.

No—she would not demean herself with such foolishness.

But still…

She did not concede.

There had to be a reason.

A force greater than mere duty, greater than obligation—something that bound you to the outside world, despite all that she had offered.

Something powerful.

Something inexcusable.

She would uncover it.

And so, she sent another.

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A shadow beneath neon glow. A whisper against the pavement. A thing neither seen nor heard, yet whose gaze—her gaze—would pierce through the veil of your world.

And in the cold silence of the castle, within the vast and empty grand hall, she waited.

Waited to see what it was that held you so tightly in its grasp.

Waited to know what must be done to sever it.

She had expected many things.

A grand home, perhaps. A place worthy of being called a sanctuary. A dwelling fit for heroes—lined with banners of victory, walls adorned with gold, a table brimming with feast and fortune. A hall that could stand equal to La Manchaland, that could rival even her castle.

A place befitting you.

And yet…

What she saw was nothing.

Nothing grand. Nothing mighty. Nothing worth the loss of you.

A modest home, crushed within the iron veins of the city, where walls pressed too close, where rooms struggled to be called their own. There were no towers, no palatial gates, no great halls filled with endless revelry.

No kingdom. No throne.

And yet—

You were happy.

Happier than she had seen you in all your nights spent within her castle. Happier than when you sat at her table, weaving tales beneath the flickering glow of candlelight.

Happier… than when you were with her.

And they—the others, the ones who pulled you away from her, who held you within this wretched place—they were happy to see you return.

The little ones rushed to your side, their laughter a melody too light, too free, clinging to you with bright, eager eyes. The older ones spoke with pride, voices warm, smiles radiant.

And you—you—with nothing but a single candle to light your home, with no throne, no crown, no feasts of kings—

You spoke to them.

Told them of the wonders you had seen. The horrors you had braved. The marvels of La Manchaland.

Her world.

Her stories.

No.

Those words—those tales—they were hers.

They belonged within her castle, within her halls, upon her ears.

Not theirs. Not here.

Your voice should not fall upon their undeserving ears.

Your laughter should not belong to them.

This—this was not right.

This was not fair.

You were hers.

And she—

She would not be made to share.

And so, she waited.

As she always did.

As she always would.

The castle stood in silence. Its gates locked against the world, its halls untouched by the outside air.

Outside, the parade marched on—its procession unbroken, its rhythm eternal. The laughter of the ignorant echoed through the neon-lit streets, ringing sharp and hollow in the air. The lights of the carnival burned, unwavering, as if untouched by time.

But within these walls, there was only waiting.

Only her.

Seated at her place, untouched by the gaiety beyond, she listened.

And when you returned, when you arrived with your usual joy, your breathless excitement, she listened closer still.

Perhaps—too intently.

At first, you thought nothing of it. How could you? It was rare, after all, for her to show even the barest flicker of true interest. But tonight, it felt… different.

Pointed.

A gaze held a second too long. A hum of acknowledgment where once she would have scoffed. The slight tilt of her head, as though savoring each word, as though committing them—you—to memory.

It was unusual.

But who were you to question it?

Had you not wished for this? For her to truly listen? Had you not wondered what lay beyond that wall of cold indifference, beyond the apathy in her voice?

Perhaps, you thought, you had finally reached her.

But as you spoke, as you lost yourself in the rhythm of your tale, in the painted images of far-off places and heroic deeds—

A tragedy unfolded beyond these walls.

A cruel, merciless fate, creeping upon the home you had left behind. A hand unseen, yet heavy. A choice made. A lesson taught.

And as she watched you, eyes focused, something shifted within her.

Because you did not know.

Not yet.

And she would attempt to spare you the pain of knowing.

So when the night drew to a close, when you stretched and rose from your seat, she offered it again.

To remain within La Manchaland.

A gentle mercy. A kindness. A final gift.

She told herself that.

But, of course, you waved her off, laughing, unconcerned.

As if nothing had changed.

And beneath the table, unseen, her fingers grasped heavily around the armrest. Causing it to splinter.

But she let you go.

And so, witness it you did.

The remnants of a life once lived. The shattered pieces of a home that no longer stood.

There was no explanation. None that mattered.

A break-in, perhaps? An unfortunate accident? The city whispered rumors of an escaped abnormality, a beast that had slipped past its chains and ravaged its way through the wing.

But what did it matter?

What did the cause matter when the result remained the same?

Your family was gone.

Not a single one spared.

And there was no one left to console you.

No home to return to. No laughter waiting beyond the threshold. No warm voices rising in unison as you recounted your tales.

Only silence.

Only ruin.

Only the weight of loss sinking its claws into the marrow of your soul.

And so, you returned to her.

But not as you once had.

Not with a smile upon your lips, nor with a tale perched upon your

tongue, eager to spill forth into the candlelit halls of the castle. Not with the same breathless excitement, not with the foolish gleam of adventure in your eyes.

No—you came as something lesser.

A broken thing. A hollowed shell, carrying the weight of a tragedy that had stripped you bare.

And she was waiting. As she always was.

But tonight, she did not mock. She did not scoff at your grief, nor roll her eyes at your foolish sentimentality. She did not dismiss your sorrow with some cool, biting remark meant to remind you of your own insignificance.

No.

Tonight, she pulled you into her arms.

And she consoled you.

She whispered stories into your ears, wove words like silk to wrap around the raw, exposed nerves of your grief. But they were not the tales you had once told her, not the stories you had so eagerly brought to her feet like offerings before a god.

No—these were her stories.

Stories of sorrow. Of loss. Of dreams burned to embers, of bonds severed by cruel fate.

Of a King, once great, once revered—a foolish man who had dared to stand against the world, against his upbringing and had paid the price for his hubris. A King who had once believed in grand ideals, who had dreamed of family, of justice, of hope.

And oh, how he had suffered for it.

Her voice, steady and cold as winter’s breath, wove the past into the present, each word a careful incision into the fragile remains of your grief.

"This City," she murmured, fingers idly tracing circles against your back, her touch firm—unshakable, "has done naught but take from you. Again, and again, and again."

Her embrace tightened, a wall of iron against the storm raging in your chest.

"It is time you awakened from your sweet, hollow dream. You have given it everything, and yet, it has left you with nothing."

And you—shattered, grieving, alone—could find no argument.

So when she offered, one last time, to stay…

To remain within La Manchaland.

To abandon the pain, the sorrow, the weight of a life stripped away.

Perhaps as a gesture of kindness.

Perhaps out of the remnants of a heart too tired to keep breaking.

You accepted.

And as her arms tightened around you, as a hand cradled your head with a touch so careful it was almost reverent—

She was the happiest she had ever been.

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La Manchaland welcomed you as though you had never left.

The lights burned as bright as ever, casting their golden glow upon streets teeming with merriment. The parade marched on without end, its dancers twirling in ceaseless jubilation, their laughter ringing through the air—untouched by sorrow, unburdened by grief. Here, no ghosts lingered. No ruins stood as grim reminders of what had been lost. No cold echoes of what had been stolen from you. La Manchaland knew nothing of mourning.

Only eternity.

And her.

She kept you close—not with chains, not with force. No, she was far too clever for that. The castle doors were always within reach, never

quite shutting you in, yet never truly letting you go. And before you stretched the wonders of La Manchaland, vast and endless, an expanse so grand that one could drown in its splendor.

She never spoke of your loss. Never dared press against the wound, never forced you to acknowledge the weight that dragged at your soul. She did not have to.

For she had given you escape.

And for a time, you accepted it.

You let the lights consume you, their brilliance washing over the faded hues of memory. You wandered the streets, tracing paths you once ignored, watching stories unfold before you as though they had always belonged to you. The dream of the City, of the life you had once fought for, of the voices that had once called your name—it all grew distant.

Smaller.

Until it was nothing more than a whisper, flickering at the edges of your mind.

And she watched.

She watched as grief softened, as its sharp edges dulled into something manageable, something ignorable. She watched as you sank deeper into the world she had built, as the shape of you shifted—not into what you once were, but into something new.

Something hers.

But still… she was not yet satisfied.

There was something in you that refused to unravel completely. Some fragment of the past, stubborn and unyielding, clinging to the tatters of what once was. A part of you that had not yet surrendered to the inevitability of this place.

And so, one evening, as you sat across from her in the castle's grand hall, as candlelight flickered between you, she spoke.

"Do you still dream of it?"

Her voice cut through the stillness.

Your eyes lifted, brows knitting together at the question. “What?”

"The City," she clarified, slow and patient, as though turning the words over in her mouth before offering them. "The world beyond these walls." Her fingers, which had been idly tracing the rim of a forgotten goblet, came to a halt. The flickering candlelight caught in her eyes, making them gleam with something unreadable. "Do you still long for it?"

You hesitated.

And she noticed.

Her expression remained still, her gaze unwavering, but that moment of stillness in her hand spoke volumes. You swallowed, feeling the weight of the question settle into you.

"I… I don’t know," you admitted at last. And for the first time in a long while, you realized you meant it.

The City was gone. Not in the literal sense, no—it still stood, sprawling and unyielding beyond these walls. But for you, it had ceased to exist in any way that mattered. Your family was gone. The life you had once fought for, bled for, dreamed for—it had crumbled, leaving nothing behind but empty streets and the hollow ache of what had been stolen from you.

And yet.

And yet, something within you still clung to the thought of it, like a name you could no longer recall but could never quite forget. A ghost of a life not so easily buried. A whisper of something unfinished.

Awful.

Her fingers resumed their movement, this time tapping softly against the goblet’s side—slow, rhythmic, contemplative.

"Dreams are a cruel thing," she murmured. "They cling to us long after they should have died."

A pause.

"Would you like to rid yourself of them?"

The question was almost gentle. Almost. So soft, so unassuming, that for a fleeting moment, you did not recognize it for what it was.

A promise.

Your hesitation stretched between you, a presence in the candlelit space that neither of you dared to disturb.

"No," you said, quieter this time. As if the words might fracture under their own weight.

Sancho only hummed—a sound of acknowledgment, of understanding, though what exactly she understood, she did not say.

"Then I shall leave it at that," she murmured, reclining ever so slightly in her seat, as though the conversation had been of little consequence to her from the start. Her gaze drifted past you, to the spaces beyond the candlelight, to something unseen—some distant thought or memory that you would never be privy to. "It is, after all, your choice. Your dream to chase, however juvenile it may be."

There was no mockery in her tone, no cruel twist of amusement at your uncertainty. Only acceptance.

"I will not intervene," she continued, fingers resuming their slow, idle drumming against the table's surface. "If you are to let go of those foolish things, you must do so yourself. No chains, no force—only time. That is the only true cure for such nonsense."

And that was the end of it.

She did not speak of it again. Did not bring up the City or its skeletons, did not ask you to choose between past and present. She simply let you exist.

And so, your life within the castle began.

It was a strange existence. Suspended somewhere between waking and dream.

The castle was vast, its halls stretching into endless, twisting corridors that defied logic. Its walls were filled with bloodfiends—portraits of figures whose eyes seemed to follow you, statues that never quite stood in the same place as before. You had walked these halls before, traced these paths as an outsider, but never as something that belonged. Never as something meant to stay.

And yet, the castle accommodated you.

Servants tended to your needs before you even realized you had them. Meals arrived unbidden, hot and prepared exactly to your tastes, though you never saw who delivered them. Your chambers remained immaculate, untouched by dust or decay. And should you wander too far into the labyrinth of the castle's depths, there was always someone to guide you back.

Sancho never hovered, never smothered—but you always felt her presence.

A constant. A shadow lingering just beyond your awareness, watching without intruding, listening without demanding. She was neither captor nor keeper, yet the weight of her existence pressed against yours, a quiet force that never fully receded.

Some nights, you dined together at the grand, empty table, the flickering candlelight casting elongated shapes against the stone walls. Your voice would fill the silence, weaving stories into the air—some old, some new, some that had been told a thousand times before but felt different in the telling.

And the strangest part was that she listened.

She never laughed at the absurdities, never gasped in awe or horror as others once had. There was no wide-eyed wonder, no visible reaction at all. But now she listened—truly listened—as though each word you spoke was worth remembering. As though, for all her cynicism, she still found something of value in the way you saw the world.

And when you were not speaking, when the space between you was filled only with the soft crackle of candlelight and the distant hum of La Manchaland filled the room, she would, on occasion, share stories of her own.

Tales of La Manchaland before it became what it was now—before the lights burned without end, before the parade stretched on forever, before the halls emptied. She spoke of things without names, of wars fought in silence, of victories that had left behind only ruin.

She never once called herself its ruler. Never laid claim to the throne in so many words.

But La Manchaland was hers. That much was clear.

And now, in some small, fragile way—so were you.

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The days passed. Then weeks. Then months.

And time, as she had promised, dulled the edges of your grief.

The City became a memory, unraveling thread by thread until it was nothing more than a distant thing. A fading echo of a life that no longer belonged to you.

Now, there was only the castle.

Only La Manchaland.

Only her.

And so, you stayed.

Even after what felt like an eternity of wandering, there were always places unknown, corridors you had never seen, rooms untouched by time itself. Some halls glowed with ethereal light, others stretched into darkness without end. Some doors led to vast ballrooms. Others opened to chambers long abandoned, their walls lined peeling wallpapers.

You had walked these corridors for longer than you could recall, and still, there were doors left unopened.

You had not meant to stumble upon one such place.

It happened by accident—just a turn taken without thought, a hallway not yet tread, a whim of direction in a place that had long since blurred the lines between past and present. And before you knew it, you stood before a door unlike any other.

It was old. Ancient.

Condemned.

The wood, blackened with age, bore deep, violent scars—scratches, gouges, wounds left by something desperate. Something that had clawed at it, whether in a bid to enter or escape, you could not tell. A single, rusted plaque hung above the frame, the name it once bore

long since erased. Not by time alone, but by intent.

And yet, for all its neglect, the door was not locked.

The handle turned with unsettling ease.

And so, you entered.

Dust choked the air, thick and heavy, untouched for what felt like centuries. The room beyond was dim, its light weak and filtered through the tattered remains of heavy curtains, casting long shadows across the walls. The scent of age lingered—old paper, dried ink, wood that had not known warmth in a lifetime.

It was not grand, not the lavish quarters one would expect of a castle.

No, it was modest.

A wooden desk stood in one corner, its surface littered with forgotten papers, their words faded to oblivion. A wardrobe sat half-open, its contents preserved only by time's cruel indifference—clothing that no hand had touched in ages, stiff with disuse. A sword leaned against the wall, its blade dulled, its purpose long since abandoned.

And a bed.

A simple thing. Small. Unremarkable. The sheets still tangled, as though whoever had last lain upon them had never awoken. Dust coated the fabric in a thick, undisturbed layer, a silent testament to years—perhaps decades—of absence.

You should not be here.

The air was wrong. Heavy.

Yet you could not bring yourself to leave.

Your eyes drifted across the room, drawn not to the desk, nor the sword, nor the forgotten wardrobe. No, your gaze settled upon something far smaller. Something that, for all its unassuming presence, felt more important than anything else in the room.

A book.

At first glance, it was nothing special.

Its leather cover was worn, its edges softened by time's patient hand.

The ink upon it had faded, but not beyond recognition. There was no title, no embellishments to mark its significance. It could have been just another relic of a bygone era, another piece of history swallowed by the castle's endless halls.

But as you reached out, as your fingers brushed against its cover, as you turned the first page and let your eyes trace the ink-stained letters —you knew.

This was no mere book.

It was a window. A door.

A voice from the past, whispering across time, carrying tales of wonder and peril, of victories carved into the bones of the world and losses too great to bear. A firsthand account, not of some forgotten scholar or nameless scribe, but of a legend. A wanderer. A fixerwhose name had once been spoken in awe and reverence.

Bari.

Her words leapt from the pages, vivid, alive.

She wrote of battles fought beneath skies that stretched forever, of duels upon crumbling spires, of beasts whose very names could turn the bravest souls to trembling wretches. She wrote of adventure—not as a distant dream, but as something real. Tangible. Lived.

And as you read, as the world within those pages unfolded before you, something long buried within your chest stirred.

A whisper of longing.

A flicker of something not yet lost.

And for the first time in what felt like an eternity—you remembered.

The City. The world beyond La Manchaland's festivities.

A place not of neon lights and hollow mirth, but of steel and struggle. A world where freedom and hardship were entwined, where every choice carried weight, where the air smelled not of artificial sweetness but of grass, of love, of something raw and real.

You sat there, the book heavy in your hands, drawn in so deeply that the walls of the castle seemed to fade around you. One story turned to another, then another. Each word pulled you deeper, unraveling

memories long buried, wrapping you in the echoes of a life you had once longed for.

It felt foolish. It felt wrong.

Had you not chosen to stay? Had you not abandoned that world for the sanctuary of these walls?

And yet—

That night, you read until your vision blurred, until the candle at your side guttered into darkness, leaving you adrift in the lingering afterimages of a world that no longer belonged to you.

And the next night, you returned.

The dust no longer felt suffocating. The air no longer carried the weight of unseen eyes pressing against your skin.

Because you were not here for ghosts.

You were here for the stories.

For the first time since choosing this place as your home, you had found something real. Something that did not exist for spectacle, for revelry, for the endless, looping cycle of indulgence and distraction.

And so, night after night, you sat in the forgotten room of a forgotten King, a single candle flickering against the dark, and let the words of a long-dead Knight take you somewhere far, far away.

At first, she thought little of it.

You were not a prisoner. You were not bound to her side by shackles, nor kept within the castle's halls by force. You were free to roam, to explore, to integrate yourself into La Manchaland's ever-turning wheel.

That was the life she had offered you, after all.

And yet—

She began to notice.

The absences. The stretches of time where you simply were not.

At first, they were small things, barely worth consideration. An hour

or two unaccounted for, an evening spent elsewhere, a night where she expected your presence at her table, only to find it empty.

But then the absences grew.

Longer. Later.

And though she never said it, though her expression never betrayed anything beyond her usual knowing calm—

She noticed.

She had always been able to find you when she wished. La Manchaland was vast, yes, stretching far beyond what the eye could see, its halls twisting in ways that defied reason, its streets folding upon themselves like a dream half-remembered. But it was still hers. There was nowhere within its bounds that could be hidden from her sight, nowhere she could not seek you out and pluck you from should she will it.

And yet—when she looked for you in those moments—you were simply not there.

Not with the others. Not among the family, laughing in shared revelry. Not wandering the carnival streets, where the lights never dimmed, where the music never ceased.

Gone.

So she inquired.

Not in the way she might have before—no sharp demands, no irritation in her tone, no narrowing of her eyes that turned questions into quiet accusations. No, this was different. She approached with the easy grace of a passing thought, a mere curiosity voiced aloud. A hand resting against her cheek, a measured glance, an almost idle question spoken with the weightlessness of casual conversation:

"Ah, and where, pray tell, have you been wandering about all this time, leaving me to wither in your absence?"

And you—smiling, ever composed, utterly unaware of the weight behind the question—answered with nothing more than a reassurance.

"I've been busying myself," you said, with a lightness that betrayed nothing. "Helping where I can. Contributing to the family. Finding

ways to be useful."

It was a good answer. A logical answer.

And so she believed you.

Of course she did.

Why would you lie?

She had noticed it in small ways, at first.

The way your voice carried a little more weight when you spoke, a quiet certainty creeping into your words. The way your hands moved with newfound confidence, tracing the air as if sketching unseen battles. The way your stories—once simple retellings, familiar anecdotes shared for the sake of filling silence—had begun to shift.

Grand tales. Larger-than-life epics. Stories spun with a fervor that had not been there before.

And then, one evening, you arrived at the table with something she had not seen in you for a long time.

A glint in your eye.

Not the soft glow of contentment, not the easy flicker of amusement—but something brighter. Sharper. Something that burned.

"Sancho, I have new stories to tell."

She tilted her head, lips curving into something amused, something indulgent. "Oh?"

"Yes," you said, your grin infectious, your energy unmistakable. You leaned forward, your excitement palpable, as if sharing a grand secret. "Tales of nail-biting duels, of woeful tragedies, of victories hard-won and celebrated beneath foreign skies."

She rested her chin upon her knuckles, watching you with an ease that only came with deep familiarity. "How very ambitious. Indulge me, then—where have you plucked such splendid delusions? Surely, not from our humble La Manchaland?"

"No—" you hesitated, just for a moment. A flicker of something unreadable passed through your eyes, too quick to catch. "They’re mine. My own stories."

Ah.

She had not seen you this alive in some time.

Your voice carried such passion, such certainty, that she almost let herself believe you. That these tales of knights and honor, of swords that cut through the dark and wills that never wavered—were truly yours.

But she was not so easily fooled.

Still, she allowed you this moment, this dream you had woven so carefully around yourself. She leaned back, exhaling a slow, measured breath, as if granting you the space to spin your illusions a little longer. And so did she, despite the ridiculousness of your words. She too spoke them back, albeit with a little less gumption.

"Speak, then, gallant traveler—what grand epics do you lay before me tonight? She gestured, open-palmed, as though granting an audience in some grand court, "Will they be tales of triumph… or merely whispers of folly?"

And so, she listened.

She watched as you spoke, as the fire in your voice crackled with unrestrained passion, as your words wove together something greater than mere stories. You lived within them, breathed them in as though they were the very air that sustained you. And in return, she smiled—at your enthusiasm, at your joy, at the way you carried yourself with the weight of something unseen.

And yet—beneath it all, something in her stomach coiled tight.

Because she recognized the shape of these words, the cadence of these battles, the names of these distant lands.

Because she knew, now, where your absences had led you.

And what you had found.

Sancho watched you from her place at the head of the grand hall, fingers idly drumming against the armrest of her chair as your voice filled the space between you. The rhythm of your speech, the rise and fall of your tone—it was all so familiar. Too familiar.

"And so, with only the tattered remnants of his cloak and a blade dull

from battle, the knight stood against the monstrous thing, knowing full well that victory was beyond him!"

Your eyes glowed with excitement, hands carving through the air as if you could shape the very battle itself with your gestures. The flickering candlelight stretched your shadow behind you, long and jagged, as if demons clung to your very heels.

"But he did not falter. He did not kneel. For in his heart, he carried the weight of those who could not fight for themselves. And so, even if his body were to fall, his will would not break!"

Sancho's fingers stopped their drumming.

A flicker of something cold, something unwelcome, passed through her mind.

It was nothing.

It had to be.

She hummed, slow and drawn out, crossing one leg over the other as she regarded you with that same lazy smile, the one that never quite revealed what lay beneath it. "Ah, how noble. Tell me, then—what became of this knight? Did he win this unwinnable battle?"

"No," you admitted, shaking your head, a small, almost wistful smile playing at your lips. "But that was never the point. He fought because it was right. Because it was the duty of those with strength to wield it for those without."

Sancho's smile twitched.

That… phrasing.

That sentiment.

She knew it.

She had heard it before.

Long ago.

Her hands curled, nails pressing faint crescents into her palm. "My, my, what grand ideals." She leans forward, voice smooth and indulgent, winding around you like a serpent. "Tell me, then—where did you glean such wisdom? Surely not from the Fixers of that

wretched City? No… those creatures are but hounds, their loyalty bought and sold. They do not bleed for honor—only coin."

"Of course not," you laughed, shaking your head, so blissfully unaware. "They're from my own heart, Sancho. From the stories I've carried with me."

A lie.

But you did not know it was a lie.

And that made it all the worse.

Sancho exhaled slowly, rolling her shoulders back as though shaking off an unseen weight. No. This was nothing. A trick of the mind. Coincidence.

And yet.

The more you spoke, the more your words wound through the air, the clearer the shape of a memory long buried began to form.

The same fire.

The same unwavering belief.

The same foolish, stubborn dream.

And for a moment—just a fleeting, wretched moment—she did not see you standing there.

She saw him.

"Sancho," you called, your grin wide, your voice brimming with warmth. "Are you even listening?"

She blinked.

And then, smoothly, easily, she smiled, a mask worn with practiced ease. "Ah, forgive me. I was simply lost in thought. Do continue—this tale is far too entertaining for me to let it end so soon."

Yes. She would entertain this.

She would indulge you.

She would watch as you wove these stories, let you live within your

little dream, let you spin your fantasies with that same boundless enthusiasm.

But the ghosts of the past had begun to stir.

And no matter how she tried to ignore them, their whispers would not be silenced.

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Another day passes.

The sun rises upon La Manchaland, gilding its grand halls and painted streets in golden light. The ignorant arrive in droves, their wonder untainted, their laughter ringing through the air, so blissfully blind to the truths concealed beneath the masks and marvels.

And the Family… the Family smiles in turn, their fangs hidden behind painted grins, their thirst left to smolder, unquenched.

Such is the nature of things. Such is the dream they must uphold.

And yet, you wander.

You busy yourself with trivialities, offering your hands in aid to the Family, murmuring sweet assurances that you have found joy within the castle's embrace. And for a time, she believed you.

Chose to believe in you.

But your absences stretch long.

Too long.

She is no fool.

And so, tonight, when your footsteps steal away into the darkened halls, she does not call for you.

No, no… she follows.

Silent, unseen, a shadow among shadows, her presence woven into the very fabric of the castle. This place is hers. There is no corner she does

not know, no chamber unfamiliar to her eyes.

And yet—

You enter there.

Beyond corridors long left untouched, down a passage she had locked away within the depths of memory. You slip through a door, one long condemned.

A room that should not have called to you. A place that should not have lingered in the thoughts of any soul.

And yet, you found it.

Through the narrow crack in the door, she watches.

You do not hesitate. You move as though drawn by an unseen force, crossing the threshold with the ease of familiarity.

Her fingers twitch.

The scent of dust and decay clings to the air. The weight of time presses upon this place, thick and suffocating. And yet, you do not recoil.

No… you bask.

Like a child lost in wonder, you let your hands graze over the remnants of a past long buried. Your fingers ghost over forgotten relics, tracing the edges of a history that should not have been yours to claim.

A tattered coat, heavy with time, draped across a long-abandoned chair—its fabric frayed, its once-proud colors dulled to ruin. You lift it with reverence, settling it upon your shoulders as though it belonged to you.

A red lance, resting against the wall, dulled with age but no less imposing. Your hands find it, fingers curling around its worn grip as though it were an extension of yourself.

You should not be here.

You should not know this place.

And yet, you sit upon the dust-laden floor, the book cradled in your

hands like a treasure beyond worth. With careful fingers, you turn its fragile pages, your lips parting to whisper the words written within.

Foolish tales.

Stories that should have burned with their author.

Sancho grips the edge of the doorframe, her knuckles white.

She had dismissed it before. She had entertained your joy, indulged in your childish imaginings.

But now…

Now, she sees it plainly.

The weight of familiarity lingers in your every word. The cadence, the rhythm—it is too practiced, too natural, as though these stories have always been yours to tell. The way those names slip from your tongue, the way your eyes gleam with reckless, eager fire—

It is his.

Her throat tightens.

She tells herself it is nothing. That you are simply enamored with old tales, that these fancies will pass like all the others. That this is a fleeting amusement, a harmless dalliance with dreams that have no place here.

And yet.

As she watches you, lost in those words, caught in the rapture of some long-dead ideal, a dreadful thought takes root in her mind.

A whisper, quiet but insidious.

What if it is not a coincidence?

Her fingers curl.

No.

That is absurd.

You are not him.

You will not become him.

She will not allow it.

With a slow, measured breath, she releases the tension in her grip. Adjusts the delicate lace at her cuffs. Draws back into the safety of the shadows.

Not yet.

Not tonight.

For now, you may revel in these stories. You may play at adventure, bask in the warmth of foolish dreams.

But soon—soon, she will remind you.

La Manchaland is your home.

And dreams of knighthood…

Are meant to be buried.

The weight of restraint is unbearable.

For nights, she has held her tongue, suffocated beneath the pressure of her own silence. She has allowed you your indulgence, permitted you to disappear into that wretched book, to let its words take root where they have no place. Every evening, you have come to her with light in your eyes, with fire in your voice, speaking of battles fought and lost, of men who stood against the tide, of duty, of honor—

Tales that do not belong to you.

And she—fool that she was—had humored you.

She had smiled. She had nodded. She had let you play the part of the wide-eyed dreamer, telling herself that it was nothing. That it would pass. That it had to pass.

But she had been wrong.

Oh, she had been so terribly, stupidly wrong.

Because now—now she sees it plainly.

The way you speak. The way your hands cut through the air. The way

you stand, as if bracing for a battle unseen. It is his.

That damned knight and her poison.

The very same rot that had seeped into her father's heart, that had stolen him away, that had twisted his love into something brittle and easily lost. The sickness that had consumed him, made him forget the ones who needed him most.

And now you—

You, whom she had embraced as one of her own—

Sancho's breath hitched.

She did not want to see it.

She did not want to see him.

And yet, when she looked at you—draped in that tattered coat, that fool's grin stretching across your lips, the rusted red lance wobbling in your grasp—he stared back at her.

La Manchaland's Don Quixote.

Her nails dug into her palms, sharp enough to tear through skin and into flesh, but the pain was nothing. It was distant, drowned beneath the tide of something far worse—the loathing.

How many years had she spent trying to erase that image from her mind? How many centuries had passed since she had last been forced to endure that wretched, naïve face of wonder?

Yet now, here you stood.

Just like him.

The flickering candlelight blurred in her vision, and for a moment—just a moment—she was back in the past.

Standing before that same flowing coat, those same bright, eager eyes. Back when his voice still carried warmth, before it had been poisoned with wistful longing, before it spoke of things that did not belong in their world.

"Sancho," he had said to her once, his words like a lover's whisper, a promise she had once believed. "There is more beyond these walls. A

life beyond thirst. I will show you."

But he hadn't.

He had left.

You are succumbing to the same disease.

She will not allow it.

She cannot.

The crack in her patience splinters wide, and before she can stop herself, the words escape her lips, sharp and unyielding.

"Enough."

The castle swallows the sound, yet it cuts through the air like a blade. The force of it halts you in place.

For a moment, there is silence.

And then, slowly—so slowly—you turn to face her.

She stands in the doorway, hands clenched at her sides, nails pressing against the delicate fabric of her gloves. Her crimson gaze, usually lidded with easy amusement, now burns.

And you—you hesitate.

Because this is new.

Sancho had never raised her voice at you before.

And yet, here she is, stepping forward, heels clicking against the aged floorboards with deliberate force.

Her expression does not waver. But her voice—her voice does not soothe.

"Tell me," she breathes, each syllable laced with something bitter, something teetering between fury and disbelief, "how long did you believe my eyes would remain shut to your feeble antics?"

The air is thick. Suffocating.

Her steps are measured, slow as she closes the distance, and yet the

tension coils tight between you, gripping at your throat.

"You sit at my table—my table—vomiting drivel that does not belong to you." Her voice is laced with quiet fury, each syllable, honed to a blade's edge. "You drape yourself in that tattered coat as though it grants you claim, clutching that decrepit lance as if it bears significance. And in the face of this farce, you expect me to sit in silent approval? To nod, to smile—to permit it?"

There is no kindness in her voice. No trace of the woman who once humored your stories with a knowing smirk.

Only steel.

Only certainty.

And for the first time, you wonder—

If you have made a mistake.

She stops mere inches away, close enough that you can feel the weight of her presence pressing against you like an unseen force. The air between you is taut, stretched thin by the tension in her frame.

Her fingers twitch at her sides, restrained, barely holding back some deeper instinct. And yet, her gaze does not waver. Sharp as a dagger, cold as tempered steel, it fixes upon you with an intensity that sets your nerves alight.

"Do you even comprehend the weight of your own words?" she presses, her voice now a whisper—soft, yet no less perilous. There is something writhing beneath her tone, something lurking just beyond the veil of restraint. "Do you truly grasp the game you are playing?"

A sharp exhale leaves her lips. She does not sigh; she does not let the breath out in defeat. No, it is sharper than that, clipped at the edges, a sound of irritation barely held in check. Her hands, no longer clenched at her sides, come together at her front, her fingers curling as though grasping at something unseen. But even as she speaks to you, her gaze shifts—past you, beyond you—settling upon the book resting in your hands.

That damned book.

That damned knight.

It is happening all over again.

A sickness. A curse. A childish, foolish dream that burrows deep into the mind, gnaws away at reason, turns good men into ghosts.

"Are you truly so desperate to tread his path?" she asks, her voice steady, yet laced with something brittle—something cold, something teetering on the edge of restraint. "So willing to cast aside what is yours? To chase after a specter that never was?"

A pause.

She tilts her head, slow, deliberate, a gesture of quiet scrutiny.

"I'll tell you how that tale concluded."

The candlelight flickers, its flame casting shadows that dance across the walls, stretching and warping like specters. But her face remains untouched by the glow, her expression frozen in something too still, too composed. There is no softness in her features. No warmth in her tone.

Only a truth she refuses to let you forget.

And then—her voice drops lower, quieter, slipping just beneath the crackling of the wick. This time, when she speaks, it is almost gentle.

"He perished for that dream."

The words land like a weight upon your shoulders, pressing down, pressing in. Heavy. Inescapable.

And yet—

She is not finished.

"Tell me—do you fancy yourself stronger than him?"

Her hand moves forward—not quite touching, not quite withdrawing. Her fingers ghost over your wrist, a breath away, close enough that you can feel the whisper of warmth, but she does not bridge the final distance.

"No," she murmurs, sanguine eyes pinning you beneath their weight, gleaming with something unreadable. "You are but a child, floundering in a world that will not yield to your whims. You will break long before it ever does."

A beat.

Then, softer still—

"And I will not stand idly by and watch it happen."

This is not a warning.

This is a promise.

She will not lose another to fantasy.

And so she told you about what happened to him.

About how he chased his fantasy beyond the gates of La Manchaland, abandoning his family to the throes of starvation and despair.

And when he returned—when his foolish dream shattered at his feet—how the family made sure he would never leave again.

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Chapter End Notes

That concludes the 3 chapters I already had drafted for the most part so the rest will not be released as fast lol

I have plenty of other ID/EGO content tho but I think the next couple I'm gonna focus on corrosions

Anyways hope you liked it

Ciao

End Notes

Hehehe

La Mancha

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!